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ABSTRACT

Simply stated, enrollment management is the process of defining enrollment goals and establishing procedures to reach these goals. The approach consists of a variety of interdependent activities, which can include the clarification of institutional mission, long-range planning, academic program planning, marketing and recruitment, retention, and career planning and placement. A major factor underscoring the need for enrollment management is the decline in the numbers of traditional college-aged students--by 1994, it is forecast that there will be a 26% drop in higer education enrollments nationally, with some regions dropping by 43%. Suggested methods of implementing enrollment management vary. Some recommend that enrollment management emanate from the Board of Regents, which should: focus the mission statements of each segment of postsecondary education by stipulating what it can and cannot do; tighten admissions standards; and establish strong mandatory transferability of credits. Some colleges are attempting to exercise greater control over the destiny of their institutions by implementing strategic planning with short- and long-range marketing plans. Enrollment management is an attempt by institutions of higher education to control the size of enrollments through a better understanding of the factors that influence enrollment patterns, and the establishment of structures and procedures to contact more potential students and influence their decisions concerning college choice and attendance. (EJV)

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Enrollment Management

by
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ERIC DIGEST

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ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Theo N. Mabry

"Enrollment management" has become one of the latest buzzwords in the lexicon of postsecondary educators. Evidence for this can be found in any number of educational journals where enrollment management articles and workshop announcements are appearing with increasing frequency. What is enrollment management? Why is it so much in vogue? Do community colleges need enrollment management? A review of selected literature will help to define the concept, explain why enrollment management is considered essential today, and explore some of the approaches being tried.

Defining the Concept

Very simply stated, enrollment management is the process of defining enrollment goals and establishing procedures to reach these goals, thereby providing an institution with the mechanisms to control its size, shape, and character. Frank Kemerer (1985), director of the Enrollment Management Center at North Texas State University, points out that enrollment management is a holistic approach which consists of a number of interdependent activities. According to Kemerer:

- Activities include clarification of institutional mission, long-range planning, academic program development, marketing and recruitment, retention, and career planning and placement.

- Responsibility for enrollment management begins with the campus president and extends throughout the institution, with the involvement of faculty being of critical importance.

- Deans and chairpersons of academic units are also in a key position to participate in and influence enrollment management. In addition to encouraging the central office administrators and others to clarify the mission of the institution, deans and chairpersons can work with the faculty in reexamining the mission, function and vitality of their own academic units.

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Defining the Problem

A 1984 paper by J. Laurence Reeves entitled "The Decline of the Traditional College-Aged Population and Its Impact on the Massachusetts Community Colleges" defines a major factor creating the need for enrollment management: the decline in numbers of traditional college-aged students.

- o In the 1960's, researchers predicted that the number of people in the 18-21 age group would almost double by the year 2000. Very few foresaw the large, precipitous, and continuous decline in birth rateswhich began in 1961, accelerated between 1964 and 1966, and continued (except for 1969 and 1970) until 1974, when birth rates began to rise again.

- o Higher education paid little attention to the decline in the birth rate, struggling instead to catch up with the enrollment growth of the 1960's by building facilities and recruiting faculty. Today, the evidence cannot be ignored. The 19-21 age group reached its zenith of 17,136,000 in 1979. By 1994, it will drop to near to the level of 30 years ago.

- o The forecast is for a 26% drop in higher education enrollments nationally, although there will be considerable variation among regions and states with the northeast expected to be hardest hit with a drop of 43% by 1994.

Community colleges are generally seen as occupying an enviable niche because traditionally they have been the most adaptable to changing demographics. The community colleges' 35% growth rate from 1972 to 1982 was fueled not only by the increase in the college-aged population, but also by disproportionately large increases in the enrollment of women, minorities, students over 25 and part-time students. Enrollment growth among these groups may be coming to an end, however, adding a new dimension to the problem.

- o The enrollment of men over 25 reached a plateau by 1980 and the enrollment growth rate for women over 25, which is seen as a one-time catch-up phenomenon, is predicted to level off.

- o The population of adults between the ages of 24 and 35 will soon begin to decline.

- o As the 18-21 year-old population decreases, other institutions will begin to recruit the students formerly served primarily by the community colleges -- women, minorities, and older students.

Materials developed for the 1985 "Demography of Community Colleges in the West" workshop illuminate another aspect of the declining enrollment problem: a demographic change in which minorities are expected to become the majority in a number of states. In general, minorities have lower levels of educational attainment and a greater need for remedial preparation for college-level work. More than half of the total higher education enrollment of minorities in the western U.S. is in the community colleges, which tend to enroll students with more diverse economic backgrounds, from families that had not previously participated in postsecondary education, and with lower entrance exam scores.

Seeking Solutions

Reeves, speaking of the Massachusetts community college system, recommends that enrollment management emanate from the Board of Regents, a statewide body established in 1980 to replace the segmental boards which previously had overseen community colleges, state colleges, and universities. He recommends that the Board of Regents:

- Focus the mission statements of each segment of postsecondary education by stipulating what each institution cannot do as well as defining what it should do.
- Tighten admissions standards.
- Establish strong mandatory transferability of credits from community colleges to state colleges and universities.
- Provide funding for part-time students equivalent to that for full-time students.
- Categorize remedial programs as high cost courses within the Regents' funding formula and fund all credit courses (including those taught in evening and summer.)

Some colleges are alreading attempting to exercise greater control over the destiny of their institutions through enrollment management. Dutchess Community College, within the State University of New York system, chose to implement strategic planning with short- and long-range marketing plans rather than adopt "quick fix" approaches (Donsky, 1987). The college's initial marketing project:

- Focused on the 1985 summer school enrollments using a market segmentation approach which included the development of measures of effectiveness in order to shape future expansion of the project.
- Adapted a Metropolitan Community College District plan, whereby students living within the district but were attending colleges elsewhere were sent personalized letters encouraging them to enroll at their nearby low-cost community college during the summer and then transfer credits earned back to their present institution.
- Tested for effectiveness by using a simple measure of experimental and and control group enrollments, which revealed that students who received the letter enrolled for the summer term at a higher rate than the control group students even though total enrollment for the college was down.

California State University, Long Beach, facing its first enrollment decline in 1978, established task forces to develop recommendations on recruitment, marketing and outreach activities. Quickly, the college came to the realization that increasing efforts to recruit more students from a declining population of potential students would not solve the problem. Instead, the college elected to redefine its enrollment goals through enrollment management, which is viewed by the college as a concept, a process, and an outcome. (Kreutner and Godfrey, 1981)

According to Kreutner and Godfrey, the concept of enrollment management means that through systematic and sensitive planning and coordinated execution, the university can control its future. This concept is undergirded by four components which link together all functions associated with attracting and retaining students. The four components are:

- o Marketing services, which represent a systematic effort to identify, display, and match college strengths and attributes with the needs, interests and abilities of all the students. Activities include an annual review of college image, the establishment of goals for enrollment and student body composition, and a comprehensive media and publications program.

- o Enrollment services, which track potential students until their registration, and include admissions, financial aid services, and registration.

- o Retention services, which involve academic departments and student affairs personnel in preventing students from dropping out.

- o Research services, which summarize other enrollment management activities, and generate data to be used in the yearly adjustment of marketing, enrollment, and retention activities.

Conclusion

Enrollment management is an attempt by institutions of higher education to control the size of enrollments through 1) a better understanding of the factors that influence enrollment patterns, and 2) the establishment of structures and procedures to contact more potential students, influence their decisions concerning college attendance and college choice, and retain those students who enroll. In addition to controlling size, institutions are attempting to control the shape of their academic programs by identifying strengths and weaknesses and matching programs to student and community needs. Finally, enrollment management is being used as a means of exercising control over the character and mission of individual institutions.

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For Further Information

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